

LA PRENSA

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Mario Duarte

Publisher

Alberto Monserrate

Director Adjunto

Juan Carlos Alanis

Director Adjunto

Marco Fernández

Chief Editor

Lorena Duarte

Associate Editor

José A. Aldea

Associate Editor

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Jorge Amérigo

Erick Alvergue

Javier Villares

Carlos Guerrero

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Alicia Sins

Noah Seligman

Antonio Sánchez

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Andrés Cid

Photography

Anna Schabel

Selene Corona

Accounting and Administration

Tanya Alvergue

Marian Sánchez

Andres Cid

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Sales

Rosbel C. Garza

Luis Sánchez

Distribución

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1516 E. Lake St. Suite 200

Minneapolis, MN 55407

Teléfono: (612) 729.5900

Fax: (612) 728.0371

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www.laprensa-mn.com

www.gentedeminnesota.com

www.vidaysabor.com

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...y así es como se escucha un día sin Latinos

Consejo Editorial La Prensa

...and this is what a day
without Latinos sounds like

Editorial Council of La Prensa

A day without Latinos

Picture it: Your name is John Doe Jr. You live in Bloomington. As you step into your car to head to work, you think, "Well, another Monday morning." But hey, it's the beginning of May, summer is not far off, and your new house is almost done being built. You're going to go check on the progress after work.

By Lorena Duarte

So you jump into your car and head off to McDonald's where you always get your morning cup of joe and an Egg McMuffin, no cheese please. As you pull into the drive-thru you notice the line is long this morning. Very long. Twenty five extremely irritating minutes later you finally get your order, with a very harassed looking manager telling you "sorry, a bunch of people didn't show up to work today."

"Huh," you think, and drive on.

You arrive at your office, and despite being later than you normally are, you are still the first one there (as usual). You go to open the door and – huh – the door is locked. Odd. Very odd, the door is normally opened by the cleaning staff early in the morning.

Once inside you go to your office and see that no one has emptied the wastebasket. A quick survey of the entire office shows that all the wastebas-

INFO

The list below includes information available at this time about Minnesota's May 1st events.

POWDERHORN PARK

3 P.M.-8 P.M. The day's biggest event will take place at Powderhorn Park in Minneapolis, beginning at 3 p.m. The program will include speakers (as yet unidentified) and music and dance. For more information, go to http://www.americas.org/item_26723 or call 612-721-1681. This event is organized by a diverse grass-roots committee.

FLYERS FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM

Flyer distribution in downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul, organized by the Alliance for Fair Federal Immigration Reform of Minnesota (AFFIRM), will take place over the lunch hour. Participants will meet at 11:00 a.m. at YWCA Downtown Minneapolis (1130 Nicollet Mall) and at Rice Park in St. Paul to distribute fliers informing people about immigration issues.

ACTC COLLEGES

An ACTC collaboration (Macalester, St. Kate's, St. Thomas, Augsburg, Hamline), spearheaded by students at St. Kate's, will take place on the Quad (center of campus) at St. Kate's, beginning in the morning and ending at 3 p.m. when participants will proceed to Powderhorn Park. Noemi Peregrino Gonzales, an immigrants' rights activist from Nogales, will speak at noon on the economic roots of immigration. Other speakers and performers will contribute throughout the day. For more information, contact Jessica Lopez Lyman at jslyman@stkate.edu or Samantha Kennedy at 651-690-6138.

ISIAIH

(and the Archdiocesan Hispanic Ministry office) will sponsor Stations of the Cross from 4:30 pm-6:00 pm, starting at the Basilica, ending at Government Plaza. Contact ISIAIH for more information at (612) 333-1260.



Photo by: Jorge Américo

kets are full, and worse yet, the bathrooms have not been cleaned. "What is going on?" you exasperatedly yell, "Has the entire world taken off work today?" No my friend, not the entire world. Just Latinos. Welcome to a day without Latinos.

A true tragedy

If we were to follow our mythical Mr. John Doe Jr. around all day, we'd discover him shocked at the one employee trying to cook, serve and check out customers at his local Chipotle, we'd see him grumpily picking through wilted looking produce at the Cub Foods (though the lines would be short there), and then to top off his terrible day, we would see Mr. John Doe Jr. blow up as he discovered that no progress at all was made on his house. Not a single sheet of sheetrock was put up, no progress was made on the roof and the landscapers didn't show up to put in his faux waterfall feature.

We can only hope that Mr. John Doe Jr. would at that moment have the epiphany that immigrant rights activists are hoping many such John Does have this May 1st; "Wow, maybe Latinos are kinda important. Huh."

The likelihood of those epiphanies depends largely on what actually happens on May 1st, the day immigrant rights activists hope will demonstrate Latinos' economic impact on the U.S.

Stemming from the all the recent debate, marches and proposed legislation regarding immigration (and perhaps inspired by the movie, "A Day Without a Mexican"), May 1st was chosen, among many other reasons, because it is International Workers' Day. Spurred forward by harsh anti-immigrant legislation that has recently been passed in the US House of Representatives and in states like Georgia, immigrant rights activists want to make their point clear, and they want to do so before the US Senate has a chance to vote on an immigration reform package (which they are schedule to do by the end of May).

Unfortunately, unlike the organization leading up to and including the marches of April 10th, the planning for May 1st has become divisive and controversial among different factions, with each one calling for different things. Some have called for a full-out strike, asking people not to go to work, to close their shops, and to protest. Others have called for an economic boycott and have asked Latinos not to buy anything, especially gasoline, that day. Still others have called for a National Day of Action and have asked that people take the day as an opportunity to educate others about immigration, carry out voter registration drives, etc.

Some accuse others of caving to corporate pressure. Others say that the boycott will only harm Latinos, our businesses and reputations. Still others say that the timing is all wrong for such an action.

Regardless of the causes, reasons or indeed, what actually happens on May 1st, the real

tragedy would be that because of in-fighting, Latinos will miss out on making a powerful point, and that is, that without us, this all doesn't work.

What we do

Although it is undeniable that Latinos are a complex and highly varied community with widely varying degrees and forms of education and employment, it is also undeniable that Latinos make up a large percentage of the workforce in certain industries. For example, according to a national Pew Hispanic Center 2004 report, foreign-born Latinos made up nearly 20 percent of the construction work force that year.

Likewise, the numbers in the following fields were enormous: manufacturing, personal and laundry services, hospitals and other health services, repair and maintenance services and eating, drinking and lodging services.

The report indicates that native-born Latinos held 591,000 jobs in eating, drinking and lodging services, and foreign-born Latinos held 1,219,000 jobs in the same field. Together that's over 1,800,000 jobs in that sector alone.

Studies specific to Minnesota are more difficult to come by; however, there is one, carried out in 2000 by HACER and compiled by Jim Kielkopf which looked at the economic impact of undocumented workers in six key industries: Eating and Drinking, Hotels and Lodging Places, Building Services, Roofing, Residential Maintenance and Repair, Nursery, Landscaping, and Fruits and Vegetables

(Selected labor-intensive agricultural industries), Meat and Poultry Processing.

The report states that, "undocumented labor in the selected industries accounts for at least \$1.56 billion, and more likely \$3.8 billion, of value added in the Minnesota economy each year," and concludes that, "If the undocumented workers were removed from Minnesota, economic growth would be suddenly reduced by 40%."

So based on those numbers, what would a day without Latinos really be like? Indeed, one can extrapolate it out and ask what would the nation be like without Latinos at all?

We will see on May 1st.

An eventful day

Many events are planned to observe May 1st in Minnesota. Some businesses will close. Some workers will stay at home. Some students will take the day off. Other workers and students will go to work or school, but will carry with them flyers to educate others about immigration. In some places, voter registration will be a focus.

There has been a whole range of different efforts aimed at reaching not only the Latino community but the community at large. The following are the key points emphasized by a Minnesota grassroots committee organizing events on May 1st:

"We support family reunification."

"We support comprehensive immigration reform, including a path to legal residence for undocumented immigrants."

"We support education for all and the DREAM Act."

"We reject criminalization of immigrants and of those who befriend or give support to them." Special emphasis has been made on the possible ways to successfully approach and convey the message this day:

"Do not buy or sell anything this day, especially not gasoline. Close your business for the day."

For those who have decided not to work, the organizations recommend asking permission from their employer or advising them of their absence. After several workers were fired after attending pro-immigrant protests all around the country, it has been stressed that those willing to support this event should not risk their jobs—according to the American Immigrant Lawyers Association (AILA), the law gives an employer the right to fire an employee without having to justify their decision. Above all, organizations encourage people to be careful in their decision to leave work without permission.

A hotline has been set up for workers with questions or problems on the day: 651-389-9172

Above all, the committee stresses that each individual must decide for him or herself, "Absenting oneself from daily activities and the consequences of such actions must be considered by each individual. Above all, the way chosen to participate in this day is a decision of conscience for each individual. There are many ways to make your support felt without running risks."

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